2: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1945
FE11 Tallensi FE11

621 loyal to the interests of these clan settlements. But the political structure
613 of the newer settlements is rapidly crystallizing out, on the basis of a
177 territorial unity reinforced by inter-individual kinship ties. This process has been greatly accelerated under the influence of British rule, with its stress on the territorial definition of political units and the support it gives to chiefs and headmen in the exercise of administrative and judicial functions.

Seniority and Authority in the Lineage

613 In the course of our morphological analysis of the lineage system from
182 within, we have made many references to the corporate activities in which this system emerges. As in our study of clanship, it has been convenient to speak as if the lineage structure exists and persists apart from the activities in which it emerges. But this is only an analytical device which we shall consider more fully presently. The implied distinction between the structure of the lineage and its functions does, however, bring out the important fact that the lineage structure is more than any of its functions. It is the integral of what is common to all Tale institutions in which the patrilineal line operates as an organizing principle. It is the general factor of consistency, coherence, and continuity in the social structure.

613 The concept of social structure essentially implies ordered extension *in time* as well as ordered articulation *at a given time*. This is often overlooked in the study of primitive society. Among the Tallensi the lineage system enables us to see the operation of the time factor in social structure in a very concrete way.[1] We see how the lineage structure at a given time incapsulates[2] all that is structurally relevant of its past phases and at the same time continually thrusts its growing-points forward. The dynamic equilibrium of a lineage is an equilibrium in time.

The key position, whenever a lineage emerges in function—and this applies to lineages of any span and all orders of segmentation—is that of the lineage head (*kpeem*). He is, to revert to an analogy previously used, the keystone of the arch. He does not stand above the lineage; he is part of it. *Kpeem* literally means 'senior': a *kpeem* is a senior, an elder. The head of the lineage is the most senior male of the group. The head of a lineage and his age or generation equals in the lineage are collectively designated 'the elders (*kpem*)'. They are for the most part the heads of the component segments of the lineage.

613 The rule of seniority, as might be expected in so homogeneous and
● 838 equalitarian a society, plays an important part in all Tale social relations. When a group of boys are out herding cattle the oldest among them are in charge. The women of a household defer to the most senior by generation, age, or marital status among them. In all collective activities of men the places of honour are taken by the most senior men, the *kpem*. Seniority commands deference at all times.

[1] Cf. my paper 'The Significance of Descent in Tale Social Structure', *cit. supra*; also Forde, op. cit. and his previous papers cited there; and a brilliant discussion of this point in E. E. Evans-Pritchard's *The Nuer*, ch. 3.

[2] I owe this valuable concept to R. G. Collingwood's *Autobiography*.

3: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1949
FE11 Tallensi FE11

basic dichotomy of *dug* and *yir* crystallizes. The comradeship which grows up gradually between husband and wife with the lapse of time is the obverse, paradoxical as it may seem, of a process of gradual emancipation of the wife. As her children grow up, the centre of gravity of her life shifts more and more to them and away from her husband. If she has a grown-up son, her interests and emotions become centred more and more on him and his family by marriage. They constitute her *dug*, in which she is secure, honoured, and titularly, if not effectively, supreme. It is her son and grandson who will honour her spirit and commemorate her in worship after her death. Her son has become the effective breadwinner, and she looks to him for sustenance. If a young woman loses her husband, her grief is aggravated because she realizes that she has lost the head and pivot of her young family and must face uprooting and readjustment to a new partner. An old woman mourns the death of her husband greatly, too, but her grief is mitigated, if she has a son, by her feeling of security and of fulfilment. The death of an adult son, especially an only son, is an irreparable tragedy to her.

Thus it happens that a woman who has been twice married often lives, in her old age, with the oldest son of her first marriage, rather than with her husband. This was the case with Tiezien's old wife, Naaho; and the reason Tiezien and Naaho's son, Nyaaŋzum, gave for this brings out a point of the first importance. Laughing, they said, 'She is no use any longer as a wife, she can't cook; and she has no vulva now (*u le ka pɔn yaha*)—that is, her reproductive powers are finished. And they laid special stress on the last point.

A woman attains her fullest freedom in the family when she ceases to have sexual value, that is, from the native point of view, when she ceases to be reproductive.

The Sexual Relationship in Marriage

The sexual relationship is the corner-stone of Tale marriage. At first sight this is puzzling to the observer, for the Tallensi have a thoroughly matter-of-fact attitude about sex. They regard sex as a normal and natural appetite. Any aspect of the generative functions can be discussed without circumlocution in the presence of men, women, or children. A young woman, or a girl, may show signs of shyness or coyness, but no one ever shows any real embarrassment. Bawdy or salacious talk about sex is common amongst men; very rarely does it verge on the obscene. The Tallensi take it for granted that children will indulge in sexual play, and attach no value to prenuptial chastity. In the ritual of the Arrow Medicine (*Peentɛ̀*) for protection in war, the services of a virgin boy and virgin girl are required. These children are bound to the medicine by a taboo of chastity in early childhood; but they are released as soon as they approach puberty; for by that time, the natives say, they cannot be expected to resist sexual temptation. Tallensi say

3: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1949
FE11 Tallensi FE11

613 the chiefs appointed since the coming of the white man. Unlike their
622 predecessors they were mostly young men when they were appointed,
554 some of them still having their natural fathers alive. But 'a chief', the Tallensi say, 'is the father of his clan. No one can claim fatherhood over a chief' (*sɔ pu dɔŋa na'ab la*—literally, no one has begotten a chief). Whatever their individual shortcomings, Tale chiefs have one thing in common, and that is a strong sense of responsibility for the welfare of their own clans.

778 As usual, this conception has a religious precipitate. It emerges in
554 the status of a man's *Yin* shrine.[1] A man's *Yin* shrine is not fully established until it is ritually 'built' (*me*). Before that it is only a temporary and incomplete entity—even though it has been receiving sacrifices for perhaps twenty years. And usually it is not until a man belongs to the generation of fathers in his inner or medial lineage—that is, attains the status of being 'fatherless' in most social and ritual situations—that he 'builds' his *Yin*. Thus it often happens that a man dies before his *Yin* is built and his son has to carry out this rite. This applies also to the last stage in the development of a man's *Yin*, its removal to the *zanɔme*, the open space before the gateway. His father's *Yin* shrine is taken indoors and his is put in its place. This is a sign that he has reached the climax of his life. He is not only fatherless, but is perhaps the last of the oldest generation of the inner lineage. He has 'built a house (*me yiri*)', that is, has sons and grandsons to carry on the line and can spend what is left to him of his old age in honoured ease.

● [888]

601 It must not be thought from the foregoing that Tallensi never extend
613 the term 'father' outside the inner lineage. They speak of all men in the clan or the maximal lineage who belong to the oldest age groups as 'fathers'—and by analogy address any old woman married into the clan as 'mother' and any older clansman as 'older brother'. But these are all courtesy titles. A man will always treat an old man of a different inner lineage to whom he gives the courtesy title of 'father' with respect; but he does not owe him any filial duties or come under his authority directly.

613 To round off this picture, let us return again to Ziŋgan biis for a
554 moment and consider the case of Da'amo'o (aged about 35). He is Kutɔbis's late older full brother's (*bier-soog*) son. He occupies the same homestead as Kutɔbis, but has his own gateway and is economically independent of Kutɔbis. Kutɔbis is his proxy father. In no circumstances can Da'amo'o claim to be 'fatherless'. He is not fond of Kutɔbis; but he cannot escape from his jural and ritual authority. Kutɔbis succeeded to his late brother's social role in full; hence Da'amo'o is his 'child' in all ritual and jural respects. This comes out in Da'amo'o's attitude to life. When a man in this position is asked about affairs that concern the clan, or even his inner lineage as a whole, he will often reply 'I am a child, I do not know. You must ask my older brothers and my

[1] Cf. p. 227 below.

3: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1949
FE11 Tallensi FE11

orphans at funerals. The ritual prohibitions falling on 'those who have a father alive', at funerals of old men, also fall on 'those who have a mother alive', at funerals of old women. But owing to the lesser importance of maternal than of agnatic descent in determining social status, whether or not one has a mother alive is of less social importance than whether one has or lacks a 'father'. The range within which classificatory 'mothers' are socially recognized is the same as for 'fathers', since 'mothers' derive their status from their husbands. But it is only the wives of 'fathers' belonging to one's own nuclear lineage who receive the deference due to a 'mother'. Beyond that range it is a voluntary matter whether or not one treats a 'father's' wife with the respect due to a 'mother'. Putting this in another way, a proxy mother is usually one's own mother's co-wife within the limits of, at most, the expanded family, who might or actually did take one's mother's place in bringing one up. It is this which distinguishes a 'mother' who is a 'father's wife' from one's natural mother's uterine sisters and kinswomen, who are also called 'mothers'. In one matter only is the recognition as classificatory 'mothers' of the wives of all 'fathers' of the inner lineage strictly enforced, and that is in regard to incest. This is of special importance when it comes to the inheritance of widows.

To take an example again from Ziŋgan biis, Da'amo'o and Ɔndieso both call Kutɔbis's wives their 'mothers'. They would not be able to marry any of them if Kutɔbis were to die. But if one of the wives dies, Da'amo'o, having lost his own mother, is obliged to go through the rites of mourning as for a mother. Ɔndieso will not. He may have his head shaven as a sign of mourning for her if she was particularly friendly with his family, or was particularly helpful to him, say by taking care of his wife during a difficult confinement. But this would be a voluntary gesture of respect, not a ritual obligation. If they are both present at a funeral of an old woman who is not married into their inner lineage, Da'amo'o will refrain, out of respect for his proxy mothers, from taking part in the rites forbidden to 'those who have mothers alive'. Ɔndieso will not, unless he wants to make a special gesture of respect to Kutɔbis or his wives. The personal relationships of the people concerned are irrelevant within the nuclear lineage. Da'amo'o, in fact, heartily dislikes Kutɔbis's senior wife and has a strong affection for Ɔndieso's proxy mother and his (Da'amo'o's) classificatory mother, Yinduuŋ, who is living with Ɔndieso. But he cannot escape the mourning rites he must undergo if the former dies, and is not obliged to undergo these rites if the latter dies.

The difference in the conventional attitudes towards a proxy mother and a proxy father is also shown in the way Tallensi look at the duty of supporting an aged parent, a subject we shall consider further in Chapter VII.

3: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1949
FE11 Tallensi FE11

CHAPTER VI

THE MORAL BASIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF PARENT AND CHILD

The Fundamental Axiom of Parenthood

593 BEFORE we try to unravel further the complex strands that unite parents and children we must elucidate an idea which the Tallensi put forward as the fundamental axiom of parenthood. We have mentioned it already in our analysis of the notion of descent, but we have to examine it now from the point of view of the person-to-person relations of parents and children. It is the axiom, clearly stated by the natives and apparent also in Tale values and usages, that the fact of having begotten or borne a child creates an absolute moral bond between it and its parents. This idea is felt by them to be the real ultimate sanction behind right conduct in the relations of parents and children; and there is a very close agreement between ideals and actualities in this province of Tale social life.

593 888 855 Ignorance of hygiene and medicine, insufficiency of food and clothing, magical ideas, and Tale cultural standards in matters such as cleanliness or ventilation are undoubted handicaps to the child in its struggle to grow up. But sheer, callous neglect of a child by its parents, such as we sometimes hear of in more civilized societies, would be regarded with horror by all Tallensi and is unheard of. Similarly, a person who abandoned an aged parent to destitution would be regarded as a good for nothing (*boŋwari*). It happens occasionally, nowadays, when young men who find life irksome at home can so easily sneak off to foreign parts and stay away for many years. But it is a very rare thing and is universally reviled.

The Tribulations of Parenthood

593 If one asks a native why parents are and should be devoted to their children; or on what grounds they claim to 'own' (*so*) their children and to be entitled to their services, affection, gratitude, and respect; if one asks a girl who is keeping sullenly indoors, because she has been forcibly recovered from the lover she eloped with and beaten into the bargain, why she submitted passively to her father; or if one asks a young man nursing a bitter grievance against a father who has stopped him from marrying the girl he was courting why he does not defy the old man; if one asks any Talɔŋ, man or woman, such questions as these the answer invariably is, 'It is *dɔŋam*'. 'Have you not begotten (or borne) them?' 'Has he not begotten you?' And then, almost always, comes the afterthought which contains the crux of the explanation, '*Dɔŋam pu tɔ?*—Is not begetting (bearing) hard?' The phrase sounds

3: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1949
FE11 Tallensi FE11

of his dead mother's spirit; she is not tied to the lineage home in the same way as a father's spirit is and can be 'given water' more easily wherever the man happens to be. Nevertheless, his welfare and that of his dependants rests as much on his maintaining good relations with her spirit as with his father's spirit.

Filial piety among the Tallensi is a great deal more than a customary injunction to honour and respect one's parents. Psychologically it is a very complex sentiment. Even during their lifetime parents have quasi-mystical attributes, as we shall see more clearly when we consider the relations of parents and first-born children, and these dominate the sentiment. A parent can bless or curse a child. A parent's curse, in particular, is greatly dreaded, as we have previously noted, and, in consequence, only resorted to in case of gross affront or unforgivable defiance on the part of a child. If a parent expresses or merely feels resentment against a child, that is equivalent to a curse which may cause it illness or other harm. Thus one element in the sentiment of filial piety is respect for the blessing and fear of the curse of a parent. That is why, men say, it is sometimes embarrassing to have an old mother in one's house, though one is bound to keep her, both in duty and out of affection. For old women become completely egoistic. All they think of is having enough to eat and being comfortable, and if they are crossed they are apt to curse anybody incontinently.

In a large joint family one often finds a young man with a growing family of his own torn between his devotion to his father and his desire to be economically independent so as to provide for his wife and children more satisfactorily. He cannot go out to farm on his own without his father's blessing and consent else his venture will surely fail. He begins to drop hints or makes a tentative approach to his father. But if the latter shows displeasure he retreats at once. I have seen this happen more than once. When Təyalbɛrəgu wanted to go out to farm on his own, his father Naabdiya reproached him, saying that *he* had not deserted *his* father as Təyalbɛrəgu now wished to desert *him*. Təyalbɛrəgu apologized and withdrew. But, as Naabdiya told me, 'I still had resentment in my heart and he still secretly cherished his plan'. A couple of weeks later Təyalbɛrəgu developed a large boil in the armpit. In panic he begged an elder to ask Naabdiya to forgive him and formally withdraw his implicit curse, which, he was certain, was the cause of the boil. It was the same with Yinyɛla's son Duun. Though as an eldest son he felt entitled to start farming on his own, he dared not ask that hard old man's permission for fear that it might arouse his resentment.

It is an interesting point that when a young man who has been living and farming with his dead father's brother, for example, sets up in his own homestead, the pretext for the separation is often not an economic one. It is commonly recognized that the young man moves out because he needs more land and freedom to provide for his family by himself.

3: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1949
FE11 Tallensi FE11

someone in the crowd always cries out that there is no one who can match these achievements or can claim that his father or mother did so.

This is the most dramatic though not the only expression of pride in one's parents among the Tallensi. They always show off an old parent, own or classificatory, with great pride to a visitor. I have often been led out of my way to shake the hand of a blind and senile old man or old woman who was too bemused with age to understand the long speech with which we were presented to each other. Women and children tell the stranger proudly, 'Don't you know so and so? I am his child.' This pride in one's parents is the reciprocal of their pride and satisfaction in the possession of children. It is so marked with old people in part because the Tallensi honour old age as a sign of good luck (*zusəŋ*). The death of an old parent is an occasion of rejoicing rather than of lamentation for they say, 'Has he not savoured life to the full? (*U pu di yɔɔr sa'ahi*).' At the same time the natives say that the death of an old man is a loss to his sons even though he had long relinquished the management of household affairs to them and had only a titular superiority in the affairs of the community. He may be blind, deaf, and senile, as Doohraan was, but he is still the head of the family and lineage, the hub of their unity, and the intermediary between them and their ancestors. However infirm an old man may be of body or understanding he is regularly told of everything that happens in the house, and his consent is always obtained before anything is done in his name, as everything that pertains to the family or lineage must be.

From all that has been said here it can be seen that filial piety among the Tallensi is by no means a simple and stereotyped attitude. Respect, affection, a feeling of mutual identification, and a sense of dependence, supported by the whole strength of the lineage system and the ancestor cult, are mingled with great freedom in everyday intercourse, as we shall see shortly, and with the strain of latent antagonism. It is an indication of the strength and internal consistency of the social system as a whole that ruptures between father and son are not very common.

Filial piety is a significant element in all Tale genealogical relationships. A person's loyalty to and solidarity with his lineage springs from his relationship with his father, his ties with his matrilateral kin from his relationship with his mother. The founding ancestor of a lineage is visualized as its 'father' and the progenitrix of a lineage segment as its 'mother'.[1] A person identifies himself with his patrilateral kin through first identifying himself with his father, and with his matrilateral kin by extending his identification with his mother. Economic motives, jural rules, and ritual sanctions work on the individual through his sentiments of filial piety.

This can be seen clearly in the interlocking of land tenure, local cohesion, and clan solidarity. The land a man owns in his clan settlement

[1] Cf. *Dynamics of Clanship*, pp. 201 ff.

3: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1949
FE11 Tallensi FE11

The Duty of Supporting the Parents in Old Age

• 818
577
593

Parents retain their rights and authority over their children throughout their lives. A man may be so senile that he can take no active part in household or public affairs. He is still the father of his children and the head of the household, the owner of the farms and livestock that belong to the household. Any of his sons living with him is automatically bound to farm for him. On this basis alone, and apart from the dictates of filial piety, an old man who has a son need not lack economic support. It is the same with an old woman who has a son. In her case, however, the stress is on the duty—a duty which is felt to be in part a privilege—of a son to care for his old mother, since she does not own any land.

An old man who has no adult sons need not necessarily lack food or shelter. He either has land of his own or can obtain some from a kinsman, and it is a question then of securing labour to work it. This, however, is no easy matter. Sporadic assistance can be obtained from kinsmen and neighbours, but it is impossible to get regular full-time labour. No one would go and work another man's farms for a whole farming season, either for a wage or as a kinship obligation. Thus an old man in this position is not likely to have more than the minimum of food and other necessaries. Tendaan Teroog was in this position. His only adult son was not living with him and he was dependent on others for the cultivation of his land. When his neighbours and kinsmen were too busy with their own farms to help him, his wife did the weeding in a rough-and-ready way. If it were not for the gifts of grain sent to him by his adult son from Mampurugu, Teroog and his family would have lived at starvation level right through the year. As it is they were just managing to subsist.

Cases like that of Teroog are not numerous, simply because the number of old men who are incapable of doing some work for themselves is small. In the whole of Tongo I knew only six old men (apart from chronic invalids) who were completely incapable of work. Another ten or fifteen (according to the criterion of efficiency employed[1]) could work, but would probably not have been able to support themselves and their wives without assistance.

A somewhat different and less frequent case is that of Sabaalug. He is an old bachelor living with his half-brother. But he does not help with the farming and so is not entitled to be supported by his brother. He keeps himself by 'scrounging' (*bimh*) a bit of food or a basket of millet, a few pence or an old garment from his matrilateral kinsmen and friends. A childless old woman like Toŋ, who lives with a 'son' of her long dead husband ekes out a poor existence in the same way. Tallensi are very

[1] Kuwaas, for example, might have done much more work if he had not had two adult sons; Voŋraan-Tee would certainly have worked less if he had had a son to help him; Ta'aŋ spent so much time on ritual and communal affairs that he did less work on his farms than he was capable of.

3: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1949
FE11 Tallensi FE11

tolerant of such old folk, but they consider their mode of life a pitiable one, not so much from the purely material aspect as from the social side. 'Who will mourn his death? Who will give him a proper funeral?' they say. But such cases serve as examples for an argument they often put forward. I once heard it very well put in a comment on life in the coast towns. There, said the speaker, you starve if you have no money. Here, at home, no one need die of destitution. If he has no children he can always find a roof with a kinsman, either one of his close agnates or his mother's brother's people, and keep himself alive by the gifts of food he gets from kinsfolk and friends. Though a man is not bound to be over-generous, and he is not compelled to feed a kinsman living with him who does not contribute to the common pool, it is an offence against the ancestors to refuse food to a kinsman in straits.

Still rarer are instances of people who come to live with a daughter in their old age. I knew of only two cases, one that of an old man, the other of a woman. It is considered to be unbecoming for a man or woman to live with a married daughter. It is not compatible with 'in-lawship' (*deen*) and Tallensi say it causes friction. A married daughter contributes to her parents' material welfare indirectly. Her chief contribution is through the bride-price paid for her. A cow received for a daughter's bride-price may be the starting-point of the accumulation of more live-stock. In times of severe shortage a bride-price animal may be used to purchase grain and so save the family from starvation. Most important, however, is the use of a daughter's bride-price to pay off bride-price debts of her natal family. It helps, therefore, to add to the woman-power of her father's household upon which a large part of the household's productivity depends. The occasional assistance given to a man by his daughter's husband in farming, house-building, thatching, and so forth is a small item relatively to the total labour required to maintain a household, but it is enough to turn the scales in a difficult year. Many of the homesteads that were being built on the Tong Hills in 1936 would not have been completed that dry season if the owners' sons-in-law from other parts of the country had not come to their aid.

In short, a native's chief economic asset in old age (and this applies to sickness too) lies in the possession of sons, best of all own sons, but also proxy sons, that is, all those who have an interest in the patrimonial land which is for the time being in his keeping. As we already know, more distant 'sons' than those of the nuclear lineage are very unlikely to live with and work for a man whom they recognize as a classificatory father. Tallensi say that one of the reasons why sons are preferred to daughters is because they will farm for one when one is old. Women are even more apt than men to emphasize the insurance value of sons just because they are more dependent on a son's sense of moral obligation to care for them.

Yet Tallensi do not explicitly state it as one of the duties of a son to

3: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1949
FE11 Tallensi FE11

support an old father economically. They assume support of an old father to follow automatically from the economic and jural relations of parents and children and from the moral obligations of filial piety. It is simply an aspect of co-operative production and joint consumption in the household under the household head's management, and a result of the principle of reciprocity. If a man's only son, for example, were living in his native settlement and refused to have his father or proxy father in his homestead, it would be a monstrous breach of ethics. He would lay himself open to immediate punishment by the ancestors; he would, indeed, be unable to participate in the life of the community since he could not act for himself in ritual or jural affairs.

This is an hypothetical instance, for I know of no such case. But nowadays the question of supporting an aged parent does occasionally arise when men emigrate from their native settlements to seek work abroad or to farm outside Taleland. Cases are occurring of men who stay away abroad and postpone their return home from year to year, leaving an aged parent to struggle on alone. They are far from numerous —I knew of some six or seven only, counting two cases where the sons had genuine grounds for their absence.

Native opinion about these absentees is illuminating. They are not criticized for neglecting to send money home regularly. Tallensi do not expect regular remittances from relatives working abroad and still tend to regard the occasional remittances that are sent home as windfalls. Absentee sons are censured rather for deserting their parents, for leaving them without the companionship and the social support of a son. Tendaan Teroog's son used to send baskets of guinea corn and maize to his father from Mampurugu. Nevertheless, the old man kept pressing him to return home; and when the son died suddenly people said it was because he had 'rejected' (*zaɣah*) his father. He should have come home long ago to be his father's companion (*kɔɣal*, vb.), to act for him in jural matters, assist him in ritual activities, and manage the household for him. The same sentiment was uppermost in Maantiya's mind when he explained why he could not leave his proxy father Saantarəba, though the latter was able to support himself and his wife with occasional assistance from kinsmen. Maantiya went down to the coast every dry season carrying fowls to sell and usually stayed away three or four months. He was always home again before the rains began. He said: 'I cannot abandon my father. He has no one else.' When I was going home in 1937 a number of men asked me to find their absent sons in Kumasi or Accra or elsewhere in the south, and to try to persuade them to return home. 'Tell them', said one old man, 'that we do not care about the money or things, but we want them to come home.'

We have said that there is a more definite emphasis on the duty of a son to provide for his mother. There was an old woman at Kpata'ar whose only son had been abroad for some years. She sent him many

3: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1949
FE11 Tallensi FE11

888 593 577

messages begging him to return, but to no avail. 'That good-for-nothing', said Tiezien, contemptuously, telling me about this youth. 'He leaves his mother to starve here while he goes wandering abroad. He is no person (*u ka nit*).'[1]

This feeling that it is a son's bounden duty to support an aged mother is strongly marked in the case of one's own mother. It sometimes happens that a woman is widowed while still young and is left with one or two young children. She remarries into her late husband's clan and has children by her second husband. When she gets past child-bearing age, even if her second husband is still alive, she usually goes to live with her oldest son of the first marriage. Tallensi say that the right person to support such a woman is this son, as her second husband has no further interest in her after she ceases to be able to bear children.

Any surviving widow of one's own father or proxy father (i.e. a close co-wife of one's own mother) is felt to be entitled to support, but in this case a ritual sanction enters the picture. Tallensi say a man is bound to support his own mother 'because she bore you (*ɔn n-dɔɣi la zugu*)' It is a direct moral duty to her. But one has to support a mother's widowed co-wife because she was one's father's wife and he would be angry if one did not. This rule applies only to widows of fathers of one's own nuclear lineage. Outside that range no obligation is felt to support an old widow whom one's mother would have called her co-wife. It now becomes a question of more abstract ethical values summed up in the concept *dulɔm*. There is no exact equivalent for this concept in English. According to Tale ethics, any act of deliberate malice or even thoughtlessness that causes trouble or suffering to another person through no fault of his own is immoral. For example, deliberately giving a person wrong information that leads him into trouble; or refusing to give or lend a person something that can well be spared, and so causing him to suffer a serious loss; or if one is in a position to prevent a person getting hurt and makes no effort to do so—all such actions come into this category of moral delinquency. They incur *dulɔm*. The concept covers both the sufferer's resentment and the ethical stigma attaching to the wrong done to him by allowing evil to befall him. The native phrase is 'it brings (or is) *dulɔm* (*de mar dulɔm*)'; and *dulɔm* bears mystical retribution in its track.

Tallensi say that if an old woman whom one calls 'mother' (either because she is the widow of a classificatory father, or out of courtesy, because she belongs to one's mother's generation of wives of the clan) has no one to support her and appeals to one, it is *dulɔm* to refuse her. *Dulɔm* is one of the reasons why one cannot refuse food to a kinsman in need. It was the reason Kuŋaaŋba gave for allowing his old 'mother'

[1] This expression of contempt contains a wealth of meaning for the native. It means, broadly, someone who has no sense of decency or is oblivious of his social responsibilities.

3: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1949
FE11 Tallensi FE11

888 593 577

Tɔŋ to stay with him. Banɔrɔg furnished another instance. One afternoon he looked in on his way home from the market and found two elders with me. He told us he was having some trouble with Ziba, a young man of his inner lineage. Ziba had an old woman, whom he called 'mother', living with him; but he had suddenly decided to get rid of her. Banɔrɔg told us how he had expostulated with the heartless young man. 'It is an evil thing to do', he concluded, amid murmurs of assent from the two elders. 'A man who drives out an old woman to starve becomes blameworthy before Heaven (*u kpera Naawun taale*); it is *dulɔm*.' Banɔrɔg's efforts, in this case, were in vain since he had no paternal authority over Ziba. The intervention of an older kinsman does not always check disgraceful treatment of domestic relatives, and public opinion only takes notice of it after the event and then often has no power to make the culprit remedy it.

593 181

A Methodological Point

The cases we have quoted in the preceding pages are précis of statements, opinions, and explanations given to me by Tallensi themselves. If space allowed, a score of cases could be quoted for each one I have recorded. I mention this because it might seem incredible, to anyone who has not lived amongst the Tallensi, that a people so primitive in their mode of livelihood should balance up rights and obligations in the most commonplace activities of their lives in so calculating a fashion. But the picture I have sketched is not a distortion. Description and analysis inevitably reduce human action to slow motion and men's motives to a seemingly mechanical pattern. In reality Tale parents commonly act as spontaneously and generously as parents in any other country and their children respond as spontaneously and sincerely. But even the most spontaneous actions and feelings of the natives occur within the framework of their social organization and subject to the values postulated in their culture. Social organization and cultural values allow of alternative forms of action and affect in any particular situation, but not of infinitely numerous alternatives. Where the relations of parents and children are involved these alternatives are not unlimited; and allowing for differences of personality and character, as the natives themselves do, we can say that the alternative that will be selected in a particular situation is determined by the structural relations of the individuals concerned. Men's motives and their social relations are closely integrated with one another among the Tallensi, as we have emphasized before. In their actual social behaviour Tallensi do not have to stop and think out every situation before they act. The individual's ideas and attitudes have been shaped by the social structure and the cultural norms. The framework of his social relations is as much a part of him as he is a part of it. He automatically evaluates every situation in terms of his social relations. To put it crudely, every Talɔŋ carries a set of

4: Fortes and Fortes E-5 (1934-1936) 1936
FE11 Tallensi FE11

may do so for himself. She, again, may eat an animal he avoids, but would hardly find it feasible to cook it in her own kitchen.

The occasions for which special foods are customary are few. A woman in her first pregnancy must eat food ' which is good for her ', such as meat and highly seasoned soup and avoid unsuitable foods such as thinly mixed flour-water (*zɪmsaka*), left-over porridge, or too many sweet potatoes or frafra potatoes. Nor may she eat cold food or drink too much cold water. ' Sweet ' food (i.e. luxury foods such as sold in the market) is not encouraged, while honey is prohibited for magical reasons. A woman found eating the latter is severely reprimanded and a special rite has to be carried out on the birth of the child or it will have a blocked nose. During confinement a woman is given porridge with highly seasoned soups and a generous allowance of fish or meat to make her strong.

There is no specific food for sick people, except that fresh porridge and pungent soup are considered strengthening. The prognosis is very grave if a sick person refuses food. In the prostration of grief, too, people refuse food and their relatives try to tempt their palate with delicacies.

Old and toothless people in time of food shortage are given crushed ground-nuts (*sukpabugra*) to drink down with water.

We have attempted, in this paper, to give an outline of the domestic commissariat of the Tallensi. Our interest has been focussed on the principles according to which the domestic groupings of Tale society organize and sustain the social activities customary for the production of raw foodstuffs, their preservation, and their conversion into and consumption as edible food. We have observed how the ever-changing, developing structure of the joint family determines these activities; how Tale culture defines the values and norms by which these activities are regulated and directed; how these values and norms, on the one hand, and seasonal conditions, on the other, control the annual cycle of food production and consumption; and finally, how the convergent influence of family structure, cultural norms and values, and seasonal exigencies determine the crucial situation of the series, the translation of the product of natural resources and culturally organized labour into the edible food in the kitchen.